



News Release

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Active Influenza Monitoring Concluded for the 2002-2003 Influenza Season

(Salt Lake City, UT) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) has concluded active monitoring of influenza case reports for the 2002-2003 season. The UDOH's tracking, which begins in October and runs through the April, showed 349 cases of influenza in Utah. The majority of the confirmed influenza cases were in children ages 5 and under.

Each year, the UDOH tracks influenza activity by reports of patients diagnosed with influenza (laboratory-confirmed), reports of patients with influenza-like symptoms (not laboratory confirmed), by monitoring absenteeism at schools throughout the state and by monitoring the rates of influenza-like illness at 30 sentinel healthcare clinics. Although the UDOH has finished weekly calls to the 30 sentinel clinics, the Department continues to recommend influenza testing and will continue to keep doctors informed of new reported cases.

The season started slowly with the first laboratory-confirmed cases reported in December, compared to October in previous seasons. The 2002-2003 season peaked during the week ending February 22. School absenteeism also peaked during that week, a time when several schools throughout the state were reporting an above average rate of absences. The last laboratory-confirmed case was reported on May 7.

Of the 349 laboratory-confirmed cases reported, the majority (90%) were in health districts along the Wasatch Front. Of the 349 cases, 258 (74 %) were type A and 91 (26 %) were type B. Sixty-eight percent of the cases were under age 5 and most were tested at Primary Children's Medical Center (PCMC). The number of laboratory-confirmed pediatric cases is higher than previous years and is due to PCMC implementing a policy of testing all children who come in with a respiratory illness.

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In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics began encouraging influenza vaccination for children 6-24 months in April 2002 because of the increased risk of hospitalization and serious infection in young children, especially infants. There were no reported influenza deaths, however, 132 Utahns were hospitalized, and all but a handful were hospitalized at PCMC. Adults often do not see a doctor for influenza symptoms, whereas parents more often seek care for children exhibiting respiratory symptoms.

The total number of laboratory-confirmed cases decreased from last season, when 460 cases were reported. However, 68 of the cases reported last season were identified through special clinics and enhanced surveillance during the Olympics for the 2001-2002 season. In 2000-2001, 130 confirmed cases were reported; in 1999-2000 there were 96. Cases under 5 years of age for 2001-2002 were 325 (71%); 2000-2001 were 59 (45%); and, 1999-2000 were 41 (43%).

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